

A Content Analysis of Selected Secondary History Textbooks' Portrayals of Christopher Columbus, Hernan Cortes, and Francisco Pizarro

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which selected contemporary high school world history textbooks portray Christopher Columbus, Hernán Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro from a perspective of Durkheim's sacred-profane theory. A process of qualitative content analysis was utilized in order to determine the existence of bias of treatment. Overall, the textbooks examined in this study evidenced a more sacred than profane bias in their portrayal of these historical figures. The results indicate a greater sacred characterization of Columbus than that accorded Cortés or Pizarro, each of whom received more balanced treatment. Of note is a lack of balance found in the contents of these textbooks' treatment of the historical figures examined, one that might invite teachers and students to think more critically about how individuals and movements in history are portrayed.

A Content Analysis of Textbooks Portrayal of Columbus, Cortes, and Pizarro

The quality of social studies textbooks is a matter of ongoing discussion and one with a long history characterized mainly by discontent. In spite of the litany of attacks which come from widely different social-political perspectives, textbooks remain the centerpiece of the social studies curriculum. In fact, if one were to attempt a description of anything close to an accurate portrayal of the social studies curriculum in American schools, the textbooks used would be a most reasonable point of departure. An ample body of literature, mostly critical, speaks to the idea that textbooks greatly influence how students understand and perceive history (Al-Haj, 2005; Apple, 2000; Fitzgerald, 1979; Giroux, 1988; Harada, 2000; Hirsch, 1988; Lintner, 2004; Reynolds, 2001; Romanowski, 2009; Sewall, 2000).

On one hand, critics maintain that textbooks lack traditional content needed to represent the dominant culture with narratives that provide the young with a held-in-common social/moral fabric (Hirsch, 1988; Sewall, 2000). Other critics argue that textbooks give short shrift to minority groups (Al-Haj, 2005; Banks & Banks, 2007) and to the perspectives of disenfranchised factions of society (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1988). Whatever the case, all contend that textbooks are a dominant source of content taught in high school history classes, and they therefore play a crucial role in shaping the attitudes of the young (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Meyers & Savage, 2005; Wakefield, 2006). While it is not easy to document these claims, textbooks are indeed widely available in classrooms. The publishing of textbooks is big business. According to recently released data the textbook industry grosses billions of dollars in yearly sales to American schools, 5.5 billion US dollars a year in K-12 sales (The Association of American Textbook Publishers, 2011). Given the dominance of textbooks as a classroom resource, there is ample reason to parse their contents.

This study empirically examines selected high school world history textbooks for content to determine the extent to which they contain divergent perspectives with regard to portrayals of “Age of Discovery” explorers, specifically Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate to what extent selected contemporary High School World History textbooks portray Christopher Columbus, Hernán (Hernando) Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro as exemplary of Emile Durkheim’s theory of the sacred and profane. The research was guided by following research questions:

1. To what extent do selected textbooks portray knowledge of the exploits of Columbus, Cortes, and Pizarro as sacred?
2. To what extent do selected textbooks portray knowledge of the exploits of Columbus, Cortes, and Pizarro as profane?

Framework

Sacred and Profane

The theoretical construct of this study is Emile Durkheim’s (1973) concept of the *sacred* and *profane* in society. Durkheim’s use of these terms has religious connotations, but certainly the terms apply as well to what is known as secular religion in which individuals and phenomena are revered, for example, the exalted treatment of the Constitution of the United States and the canonization of Abraham Lincoln as sacred figure. We frame the investigation specifically regarding history textbook portrayals of Christopher Columbus, Hernando Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro. Durkheim’s construct of the *sacred* and *profane* creates a framework for understanding the cultural nature of a discussion of textbook content in the sense that it allows a lens for viewing textbook content from different ideological perspectives.

According to Durkheim (1973), the *sacred* in society is that which is viewed as culturally implicit in one’s understanding of societal workings. *Sacred* knowledge artifacts are handed down from one generation to the next as ways of furthering cultural cohesion and understanding. This cultural transmission takes place through what Durkheim refers to as the *totem*. The purpose of the *totem* is the promotion of the great deeds of people in a nation’s mythos (Durkheim, 1973). Not only are the deeds of individuals promoted, but also the values those deeds embody are upheld as well. Sympathetic treatment of war, peace, love, religion, competition, democracy, equality, capitalism (Hirsch, 1988), and other aspects of societal and cultural heritages can be viewed as *sacred* values in American society. Chester E. Finn Jr. (2012) argued that participation in government and patriotic values are essential *sacred* principles that all students should learn. According to Damon (2011), the American Dream is the paramount *sacred* artifact that Americans should pass on to the youth. The American Dream comes together through patriotism, liberty, duty, traditional moral values, sacrifice, and industriousness. A national ethos often links with spilt blood and a shared cultural background (Montgomery, 2005). A prominent example is the sanctification of Abraham Lincoln and the sacrifices made to hold the Union together. Blood ties, an individual or group’s ancestral beginnings, shared culture and ethnicity are included in the criteria for affiliation, belonging to a nation. According to Montgomery (2005), the patriotism and promotion of national pride associated and supported by a national ethos is identified with civic virtue.

It is argued from a sacred perspective that national identity is defined by a shared culture, history, language, religion, territory, politics, and economics, and on some level, race (Reynolds, 2001). These elements of nationhood are written into textbooks so that a sacred cultural heritage will be transmitted to and internalized by the coming generation. Reynolds notes that the continuity of knowledge of the *sacred* in society is achieved through the passing down of these ideas and events, which manifest into the qualities of citizenship. And in this respect school textbooks represent an integral agent of cultural transmission.

It is argued that textbooks are a necessary vehicle to promote the national ethos with respect to nation building. They represent a held-in-common source on which the values of patriotism, national pride, and civic duty to the state are conveyed to young people (Al-Haj, 2005; Commeyras & Alvermann, 1994; Lintner, 2004). Given this, however, secondary school history textbooks are often a reflection of the national ethos of the time in which they are written (Fitzgerald, 1979). These books reflect the dominant values of the people and government of the time and are not necessarily a reflection of historical scholarship (Fitzgerald F. , 1979).

Social studies and history teachers are expected to teach the precepts of citizenship to students (NCCS Strategic Plan, 2014). Governments expect teachers and school districts to promote the national ideologies of patriotism and citizenship (Al-Haj, 2005; Asanova, 2007; Marsden, 2000; Reynolds, 2001; Zajda, 2007) held by the state. Citizenship and civic education are stated goals of the National Council for the Social Studies (2009). Social studies education is clearly linked to civics, and it is argued by some that a national ethos emphasized in the education system creates better citizens (Hirsch, 1988; Ravitch, 1990). Montgomery (2005) writes that state sanctioned histories presented in textbooks enforce harmony through civic loyalties, impose the ideal rights and responsibilities, make nationalistic pride obligatory, and encourage civic duty.

To enable a fuller understanding of the nature and source of *sacred* knowledge and *profane* ideas in history textbook content, this investigation uses the educational perspectives of essentialism to explore *sacred* knowledge, and multiculturalism and critical theory to explore *profane* ideas. Essentialists advocate learning traditional values while recognizing modern ideas as part of a complete cultural understanding. Essentialists focus on developing curricula that socialize and enculturate individuals to be active, contributing participants in society based on a core of knowledge regarding the contributions of people, events, and ideas (Guadelli, 2002). Multicultural education is based on the idea that students should have an equal opportunity to learn in school, regardless of race, gender, or social class (Banks & Banks, 2007). Multiculturalists argue that different cultural identities and not merely the dominant cultural perspective must be honored. This perspective is linked to critical theory in the respect that all voices must be heard and their perspectives valued. Critical theory is a philosophy whose adherents argue that dominant groups oppress minorities through established institutions (Habermas, 1972). Critical theorists are concerned that established institutions indoctrinate students through the promotion of biased material, particularly in textbooks (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1988). Of particular interest in this investigation is the balance of these perspectives found in textbooks designed for courses in high school world history classes.

Textbooks and their Discontents

According to certain commentators (Apple, 2000; Giroux, 1988; Meyers & Savage, 2005, Wakefield, 2006), textbooks are the dominant form of content delivery in classrooms and provide the framework by which students receive information. These claims, while possibly valid, are difficult to substantiate. There is reason to think, according to Issitt (2004), that conversations with teachers and students about textbooks elicits a range of responses from apathy and scorn to downright loathing. Yet, despite these reactions from teachers and students, K-12 textbook sales as of 2010 represented an estimated \$5.5 billion dollar per year business (The Association of American Textbook Publishers, 2011). High school history courses will “cover” anywhere from a few centuries (California State History Standards, 2012) to thousands of years (Texas Education Agency, 2012) in a single school year. It could be deduced that teachers need textbooks in history classes given the sheer volume of time and space to be covered. Textbooks, therefore, are used as a tool in the classroom to provide a dependable knowledge base on which to build. Because history teachers use textbooks as the main source of information for their students (Issitt, 2004), textbooks are, for better or worse, often viewed as truth and sources of authority on the subject matter by those who read them (Apple, 2000; Fitzgerald, 1979; Giroux, 1988).

Given perceptions of the widespread use of and authority attributed to textbooks, the knowledge contained in their pages is deemed to be influential. Michael Apple (1990) has suggested much textbook content endorses the dominant social and political group’s vision of needed knowledge. In this study we explore the extent to which the sacred and profane are portrayed with respect to textbook samples selected from the “Age of Exploration,” namely, the quantity and quality of information accorded Christopher Columbus, Hernan Cortes, and Francisco Pizarro. Certainly, there are gaps in the research regarding the portrayals of Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro in high school history textbooks. One study in 2009 examined the portrayal of Columbus’s encounter with the Taino peoples (Sabis-Burns, 2009) as documented in elementary school books, but no similar study exists regarding this episode in secondary textbooks. Another study involved a content analysis conducted in 1997 that assessed information on Christopher Columbus in the study of textbooks available from 1986 to 1992 (Wartenberg, 1997). There have been no dissertations examining textbook coverage of Hernando Cortés and Francisco Pizarro. While studies are found that utilize Durkheim’s construct of *sacred* and *profane* (Benton, 1981; Larsen, 2010; Letvin, 1980) to analyze textbook content, I was unable to find any that apply this concept to the study of Columbus, Cortés, or Pizarro in world history textbooks.

Method

Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative Content Analysis is a systematic methodology of translating the meanings around us into categories for coding (Kohlbacher, 2009; Schreier, 2012; Trotter & Manzo, 2007). Qualitative Content Analysis helps the researcher describe material within the parameters established in the research questions. The research questions enable the method to utilize the established questions, within the theoretical framework from which they are derived, to reduce data to categories that enable the researcher to describe the information coherently (Schreier, 2012, p. 3). This study follows a deductive method of Qualitative Content Analysis (Kohlbacher, 2009; Schreier, 2012; Trotter & Manzo, 2007) in which the researcher seeks to develop categories based on a theory, construct, or model. Once these categories are selected, the researcher will locate the data into appropriate categories for analysis.

Selecting Material

According to Krippendorff, “content analysts are seldom interested in text populations that are representations of the universe from which they are pulled; instead they are interested in texts that answer the research question” (2004, p. 113). For example, if a researcher were interested in examining changing perspectives of African Americans in textbooks over the last 50 years he/she would probably select U.S. history textbooks from that time period. If a researcher were interested in examining current perspectives on African Americans, the researcher will examine the most currently published textbooks. Since there are only three major k-12 textbook publishers in the U.S. (Apple, 2000; Trotter & Manzo, 2007), the research questions of this study explore the contents of the most current world history textbooks published by the three major textbook publishers. The textbooks being examined in this study are *World History: Patterns of Interaction* by Beck, Black, Krieger, Naylor, and Shabaka published by Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (2012), *Glencoe World History* by Spielvogel published by McGraw-Hill (2010), and *Prentice Hall World History* by Ellis and Esler published by Pearson (2011).

Building a Coding Frame

In qualitative content analysis, the coding frame allows the researcher to apply the theoretical construct to the text for description. The “coding frame is a way of structuring one’s material, a way of differentiating between different meanings” (Schreier, 2012, p. 61) in relation to the investigator’s research questions. The coding frame is essential in reducing the data so it can be placed in main categories or other specific aspects the researcher wants to focus on for the analysis (Schreier, 2012). The coding frame filters out material that is not pertinent to the main categories. These aspects are located in the research question. This study utilized the theoretical construct of *sacred* and *profane* as developed by Emile Durkheim to develop main categories. Once the main categories were established, subcategories were developed.

Subcategories further help the researcher reduce and summarize the data. This study created subcategories of multiculturalism and critical theory under the main category of *profane*, essentialism under the main category of *sacred*, and neutral as its own main category. Neutral is being used as a main category due to the possibility that the information is neither *sacred* nor *profane*. The research questions, by asking “to what extent,” leave open the possibility that the information in the text is neutral. In the development of a coding frame, it is required that each of the main categories and subcategories be one-dimensional (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Schreier, 2012; Weber, 1990). One-dimensional implies that each main category “in your coding frame should capture only one aspect of your material” (Schreier, 2012, p. 72). It is critical that the main categories and subcategories are mutually exclusive.

After establishing the main categories and subcategories, the investigator then develops definitions for each category. According to Schreier (2012), “category definitions are the rules for assigning data segments to categories” (p. 94), in other words the rules that the investigator will use when coding the material. The process of definition of categories provides a name, a description of what is meant by the name, and examples. Our coding frame (Table 1) comes from a modification of Schreier’s (2012) examples and contains the definitions under each main and subcategory. We decided to put the definitions into the coding frame to help coders properly input the data by having immediate access to the definitions instead of looking at a different page. In the coding frame, a Likert scale was utilized to determine strength of confidence in the coding.

Dividing the Material into Units of Coding

Segmenting, or unitizing as it is called in content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004), is the dividing of material into units so that each fits in the coding categories of the coding frame (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Schreier, 2012; Trotter & Manzo, 2007; Weber, 1990). Units can be single words, characters, themes, periods, interactions, pictures, visuals, or any other outcome taken from the content parsing. Units need to be distinct from one another, logically, conceptually, and physically, or the outcomes will not add up (Krippendorff, 2004). Properly defining units is important because they describe what is to be observed empirically. Poor unitizing can lead to issues in inter-coder reliability (Weber, 1990). The key to avoiding issues in coding is to provide clear and concise instructions and rubrics for fellow coders to follow. According to Krippendorff, the most problematic issue of content analysis is poor inter-coder reliability (2004).

This study used *sentences*, *paragraphs*, and *pictures* as examination units. The use of the *sentence* and *paragraph* was important to provide context to the specific word choice used by the author(s) and to evaluate contextual essence. Individual words were not used as a unit because they would have provided too narrow a scope. The unit *page* was not used because it lacked the nuance to make meaningful inferences.

Page copies from each textbook were made for passages on Columbus, Pizarro, and Cortés, and then divided into units that make sense contextually (Schreier, 2012). The units were cut out, pasted on color index cards, and attached to a page with the coding frame.

Evaluating and Modifying the Coding Frame

The next step in the qualitative content analysis is piloting the coding frame. Piloting of the coding frame is important for examining the coding frame for inter-rater reliability and validity. Reliability in qualitative content analysis is focused on the consistency in the application of the coding frame. The method of inter-rater reliability was utilized to check for consistency in the instrument. To check for inter-reliability, a coder outside of the process was trained to code a piece of the material being studied. According to Schreier (2012), in qualitative content analysis, the researcher attempts to develop an in-depth description of the data presented, and thus it is advantageous to use some of the actual data in the pilot study. The danger in using a different piece of data stems from the development of the coding frame. In developing the coding frame, a researcher sets up the categories dependent on the research questions. Using a different piece of material to check inter-rater reliability and make adjustments based on a coding of the different material could make the coding frame no longer suitable for the intended material.

The piloting phase occurs when the researcher checks the validity of the instrument. An instrument is held valid to the degree that it captures what it sets out to attain (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Schreier, 2012; Weber 1990). According to Schreier, "a coding frame is valid to the extent that the categories adequately represent the concepts under study" (p. 175). To determine the validity of a coding frame, the researcher needs to develop main and sub-categories that fit the research questions. In content analysis, there are four types of validity: face, content, criterion, and construct (Neuendorf, 2002). Face validity is the extent to which the instrument measures what the researcher intends. Content validity is the extent to which the instrument covers all aspects of a concept. Criterion validity is established by examining the relationship between one instrument and another whose validity has been recognized previously. Construct validity examines the relationship between the concept the researcher is using in the study and other possible notions.

Content validity is associated most with the research questions for this study since the two concepts applied were *profane* and *sacred*. Therefore, it is important that these concepts are adequately reflected in the categories (Schreier, 2012). To check for content validity, the researchers and other coder examined the coding after the inter-rater reliability test to see if the individual categories matched-up with the research questions. After examination of the inter-rater reliability and discussing the coding frame in relationship with the content, it was determined that the coding frame and research questions met face, construct, and content validity.

To conduct the inter-rater reliability, the aid of a professor of education who teaches graduate courses in statistics and research was solicited. This coder was chosen due to trainability and a lack of in-depth historical knowledge of this particular content. A lack of historical knowledge concerning this topic was important because it ensured that the definitions in the categories were what the coder was basing the coding on, not applying coding/information already known regarding each of the explorers.

After the coding, inter-rater reliability was checked by tabulating percentages previously agreed upon (Schreier, 2012) and by employing Cohen's Kappa (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2002; Schreier, 2012; Weber 1990) statistic to test inter-rater reliability between the coders. Schreier notes that in a qualitative study, a percentage agreed upon could be sufficient to check for inter-rater reliability. Percentage agreement occurs when the investigator takes a percentage of the amount of times he or she and another coder agree on individual coding units. The percentage agreement between the two coders was 80.7%. The main concern regarding percentage agreement is that it does not take into consideration the random chance of agreement. To account for the random chance of agreement, a Cohen's Kappa was used. To check Cohen's Kappa, data was entered into SPSS for a statistical analysis. For this study, the inter-rater reliability between the two raters was Kappa = 0.707 with $p < 0.001$ (Table 2). According to Landis and Koch (1977), a Kappa statistic that is between 0.61-0.80 is considered *substantial*.

Table 1: Inter-rater Reliability

	Value	Asymp. Std. Error ^a	Approx. T ^b	Approx. Sig.
Measure of Agreement Kappa	.707	0.066	9.145	0.000
N of Valid Cases	88			

Given that the inter-rater reliability for this study fell within Landis and Koch's *substantial* range it was appropriate to complete the study. Once inter-rater reliability was checked, SPSS tested the frequencies from the data. *Sacred, profane, neutral*, Columbus, Pizarro, Cortés, Glencoe, Prentice-Hall, and Houghton Mifflin were the variables. To report the data, all frequencies were determined in order to demonstrate the amount of context units coded *sacred* or *profane*. Then, examples of *sacred* or *profane* context units were provided to demonstrate the category fit (Schreier, 2012).

Results

The overall findings of this study on *sacred* and *profane* with regard to treatment of Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro show that 48.8% of the total context units ($n = 88$) examined are *sacred* (Table 2). The percentage of context units that are *profane* are 26.4%, while 22.7% of the context units are neutral. In the following sections the data will be further broken down to specifically address the research questions.

Table 2: Total Percentages of Textbooks

Overall <i>Sacred, Profane, and Neutral</i>		
<i>Sacred</i>	<i>Profane</i>	Neutral
($n = 42$) 48.8%	($n = 24$) 26.4%	($n = 20$) 22.7%

To what extent are textbooks dominated by sacred knowledge in relationship to Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro?

The combined context units of this study are *sacred* in nature, but when the context units are broken down among Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro the data shows Christopher Columbus received a much greater *sacred* treatment than the other two explorers did (Table 3). The context units deemed sacred regarding Columbus are 58.5% *sacred*, 42.4% for Cortés, and 38%.

Table 3: Explorer Sacred

	Number of Units Sacred	Percentage Sacred
Columbus	20	($n = 34$) 58.5%
Cortés	14	($n = 33$) 42.4%
Pizarro	8	($n = 21$) 38.0%

To what extent are textbooks dominated by profane ideas in relationship to Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro?

The overall coding of the context units equaled just under a third *profane*. Each of the explorers coded individually indicated less than a third of the units as *profane* (Table 5). The context units about Columbus coded *profane* at 29.5% followed by Pizarro at 28.5%, and Cortés the lowest at 27.3%. However, given how close the context units are percentagewise for the three explorers, it is difficult to state that one was considered significantly more *profane* than the other. Overall, none of the context units could be considered *profane*.

Table 4: Explorer Profane

	Number of Units <i>Profane</i>	Percentage <i>Profane</i>
Columbus	10	(<i>n</i> = 34) 29.5%
Cortés	9	(<i>n</i> = 33) 27.3%
Pizarro	6	(<i>n</i> = 21) 28.5%

Discussion

Researchers and commentators attribute great importance to history textbooks and the nature of the content contained within. Gilbert T. Sewall of the American Textbook Council claimed “the ways that history textbooks affect how students see themselves, their nation, and the world cannot be quantified” (2000, p. 2). Apple argues that textbooks have “important implications not only for the politics of how and by whom textbooks are used, but for the politics of the internal qualities, the content and organization, of the text” (2000, p. 52). A major premise of Francis Fitzgerald’s seminal book *America Revised* (1979) is that history textbooks are not written with historical accuracy in mind; rather, they are written to fit the dominant ideology at the time they are composed. E.D. Hirsch Jr. argues that textbooks should reflect the central core teachings of society (1988). These core teachings should enculturate students to the dominant culture. As Hirsch (1988) stated, “Americans have the right to disagree with the traditional values but none the less acquiesce in the dominant civil ethos” (p. 99).

In addressing the existence of content bias in textbooks, this work applied Emile Durkheim’s construct of *sacred* and *profane* (1973). Durkheim’s idea of the *sacred* fits into Hirsch’s ideas of the dominant civil ethos; it is the expected knowledge of society. Sacred knowledge is that which society holds as exemplary in an attempt to explain and find it acceptable, even uplifting. Such knowledge is meant to provide an ethos which shapes the character of a society. *Sacred* knowledge consists of important people, events, and rituals considered by those who hold the power of the pen, perhaps as Apple and other critics suggest, to be the fabric that holds society together. Durkheim wrote that to accept *sacred* knowledge “individuals should fix themselves to the idea of the totem rather than that of the clan” (1973, p. 183). The totem represents what is most important in society and is the force that ties it together. When trust in those who promote the totem is brought into question, *profane* ideas enter society.

The *profane* in society is the questioning of this knowledge and its legitimacy for holding sway on society. According to Durkheim (1973) the *profane* becomes desirable when the *sacred* no longer engages society and man needs to seek something that fulfills the need for more. Once the totem fails to represent portions of society, *profane* ideas become more intense and prevalent in society. Multicultural advocates and Critical Theorists question the legitimacy of *sacred* knowledge. James A. Banks, a notable advocate of multicultural education, argued that “multicultural education incorporates the ideas that all students regardless of their gender and social class and their ethnic, racial, or cultural characteristics – should have an equal opportunity to learn in school” (Banks & Banks, 2007, p. 3). Critical Theorists take it further than inclusion, they question the nature of the dominant culture. Giroux (1988) stated “the dominant culture in the school is characterized by a selective ordering and legitimating of privileged language forms, modes of reasoning, social relations, and lived experiences” (p. xxx).

While Durkheim (1973) used the construct of *sacred* and *profane* as a means to discuss religion in society through the discussion of totems and what belongs on them, society also places secular events and people on totems. Mount Rushmore is a prime example of the modern day totem, one that serves as a reminder of four presidents that society deemed to be great. The Lincoln Memorial, Washington Monument, Jefferson Memorial, Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial, Vietnam Veterans Memorial, National World War II Memorial, and statues of Columbus located through the US all constitute secular totems. Columbus, unlike Pizarro and Cortes, became a totemic figure early on in a new nation eager to establish a distinctly different identity and set of traditions separate from that of England. A cursory internet search found a website dedicated to Columbus monuments worldwide with eight pages of pictures of monuments/statues with locations across the U.S. (Krogt). Columbus also has a holiday that takes its place in the American calendar along with other such holidays as Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Independence Day, Labor Day, and Thanksgiving. In more recent times, Martin Luther King, Jr. has been accorded totemic status, and his birthday is honored as a national holiday. Although Columbus retains totemic status, his image has been tarnished in recent years.

A growing revisionist movement questions his exalted place in the pantheon, arguing against such status, in fact, claiming that he should receive a more *profane* treatment particularly because of his treatment of Native Americans. The state of South Dakota is changing Columbus Day to Native American Day (Natalie-Lees, 2012), University of California Berkley changed Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day (New York Times, 1992), and the State of Vermont no longer considers Columbus Day amongst its paid holidays (Department of Human Resources). Thus there are no guarantees. Nothing changes so much as the past, or at least our treatment of the past.

Neither Hernan Cortés nor Francisco Pizarro play heavily into the formation of the American mythos, making cultural perception of their exploits more problematic. The content of the U. S. history textbooks and other supporting material examined for the purpose of this study yielded little information or perspective on existent cultural views of Pizarro in Peru. Some viewpoints on Cortés in the U.S. and Mexico did emerge. Marjorie Miller of the Los Angeles Times emphasized the discontent for Cortés in Mexico. She writes that “to many Mexicans, Cortés is a symbol of rape and plunder. He tore down Tenochtitlan, capital of the Aztec Empire, and imposed Spanish rule over Indian civilization” (Miller, 1992). Leonardo Tarifeño notes a Mexican perspective that Cortés represents subjugation and extermination of the native people (Tarifeno, 2003). Despite these negative views, there is an argument for a more balanced perspective on Cortés. Nobel laureate Octavio Paz stated “it is time that Cortés took his rightful place as a historic figure” (Miller, 1992). Advocating a more balanced view on Cortés, Carlos Fuentes stated “our father was Hernan Cortés whether we like it or not” (Miller, 1992). According to Tarifeño, Cortés deserves to be recognized for his faults as well as accomplishments (2003). Given a growing Hispanic population in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2012), how Cortés is portrayed could take on more flavor over time as high school textbooks include him as a contributor for better or worse to American history.

To what extent are Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro sacred or profane?

The three textbooks examined in this study lean towards *sacred* when all the context units are compiled (Table 5). Of the 88 total context units coded in this study, 48.8% of them are *sacred*, 26.4% of them are *profane*, and 22.7% of them are neutral. *Sacred* context units almost nearly doubled the *profane*. When the context units are broken down by explorer and textbook a more nuanced discussion occurs.

Table 5: Sacred and Profane by Explorer

	Sacred	Profane	Neutral
Columbus	58.5%	29.5%	12.0%
Cortés	42.4%	27.3%	30.3%
Pizarro	38.0%	28.5%	33.5%

Each of the three explorers is given a different treatment in terms of being coded *sacred*. Across all three textbooks used in this study *sacred* coding for Columbus was 58.5%, Cortés was 42.4%, and Pizarro was 38.0%. Each textbook provides a slightly different portrayal of each explorer (Table 6).

Table 6: Sacred and Profane Coding Units per Textbook

	Glencoe (<i>n</i> = 24)			Prentice Hall (<i>n</i> = 33)			Holt McDougal (<i>n</i> = 31)		
	Sacred	Profane	<i>n</i>	Sacred	Profane	<i>n</i>	Sacred	Profane	<i>n</i>
Columbus	5	1	6	4	5	14	10	3	14
Cortés	6	1	12	4	4	12	4	4	9
Pizarro	5	1	6	0	2	7	3	3	8
Percentage	66.6	12.5		24.4	33.3		54.8	32.2	

Glencoe World History (Spielvogel, 2010) has more *sacred* knowledge than the other two textbooks when it comes to Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro. Glencoe World History has the highest percentage of *sacred* context units with 66.6% of the total material scored as *sacred*. All but one of the context units for Columbus and Pizarro are *sacred* and a half of the context units for Cortés are coded *sacred* in Glencoe World History. Where Glencoe World History clearly leans to the *sacred*, the other two textbooks provide a somewhat different view. Holt McDougal (Beck, et al., 2012) varies per explorer in *sacred* treatment and Prentice Hall (Ellis & Esler, 2011) does not lean *sacred* for any of the explorers.

Holt McDougal World History codes *sacred* at 54.8%, but it has varying degrees as to how the information is treated when it comes to the three explorers. The percentage of *sacred* units is influenced greatly by how Columbus was coded for 10 of 14 units as *sacred* where Cortés and Pizarro code only half of their units as *sacred*. Prentice Hall World History codes dramatically less *sacred* at 24.4%. Under half of the Columbus and Cortés units coded *sacred* and none of the Pizarro context units code as such. None of the explorers coded *profane* (Table 6) and unlike the *sacred* context units, there is very little variation among the ways the three textbooks address each explorer. When the entire context units are combined across the three textbooks, Columbus, Cortés, and Pizarro coded less than 30% *profane* (Table 6). The percentages are close enough that there is little discernible difference. When broken down by textbook per explorer, the variance in treatment of explorer in terms of *profane* is negligible. Glencoe World History (Spielvogel, 2010) had three context units that were *profane* for each of the explorers (Table 6) making it the lowest for all the textbooks. Holt McDougal World History (Beck, et al., 2012) is more balanced in its treatment.

Of note is the fact that Columbus receives a much greater *sacred* treatment than the other two explorers. Both Glencoe World History and Holt McDougal World History provide him a heavily slanted *sacred* treatment whereas Prentice Hall World History provides a more balanced perspective. Pizarro and Cortés received a much more balanced treatment across the textbooks making it difficult to conclude whether either one received a *sacred* or *profane* treatment in those texts. There has been a shift on the opinion of Columbus over time from *sacred* to one that incorporates more *profane*. Alternative-view voices have become louder in decrying Columbus for his actions taken against the Taino and the long term affect his actions had on indigenous peoples in general. Given the findings of this study, textbooks appear to lag behind the social shift from Columbus as a *sacred* figure to a more *profane* personage. That is not to say there is or should be a complete shift in the portrayal of Columbus, who was neither saint nor villain, but as many historians have pointed out, a person of his time. This point alone could improve the contents of the materials we have examined in this study. Textbooks should provide an engaging narrative of Columbus as both a *sacred* and *profane* figure. Such balanced treatment, not merely of these characters from the pages of history, of individuals and movements makes a history book potentially more engaging and inviting as a vehicle for critical thinking.

Limitations

The findings in this study cannot be generalized beyond the sample and are thus limited to these specific textbooks and their portrayals of Christopher Columbus, Hernan Cortés, and Francisco Pizarro. Other historical figures may receive different treatments due to their societal and historical importance. The purpose of Qualitative Content Analysis is to reduce the data into manageable forms for analysis making the data descriptive in both qualitative and quantitative forms, thus limiting what degree to which these findings can be generalized. Thus given the purpose of the study, that is, to examine the treatment of three historical figures as found in three best-selling textbooks, any inferences are circumscribed by and limited to the information contained in them.

While the inter-rater reliability statistic derived here is considered *substantial* by Landis and Koch (1977) standards, it could be stronger. According to Landis and Koch 0.80 and above is considered the strongest relationship between raters. Despite the relatively strong inter-rater reliability *Kappa*, there is always the possibility that researcher bias influenced both the development and implementation of the instrument. Reasonable criticisms include the fact that researcher bias could have been better limited, a stronger instrument developed through more practice-runs, and an increased number of outside opinions solicited regarding the instrument (Krippendorff, 2004; Schreier, 2012).

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